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The Y.M.C.A.'s First Century in Rochester

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

The Rochester Y.M.C.A., like most other institutions, is more than a building with its equipment, more than an active membership and staff, more even than a program and a function, though all of these are part of the larger whole. It is, moreover, the product of an historical development, rich in the experience it has gained from a flexible program, and endowed with the traditions of a far-flung "Y" movement. Its ever-present purpose has been "to bring young men to Christ and the Church."

The test of the "Y's" vitality is always contemporary and will ever be judged by the success with which it meets the current needs of young men, yet the ability of any association to respond can often be appraised and perhaps improved by a study of its past performance. Thus the Rochester "Y" has had its ups and downs, its periods of leadership and great accomplishment as well as periods of discouragement, even defeat. Indeed for several years shortly after its original establishment in 1854, the Rochester "Y" languished and was almost forgotten; even its second and third starts in 1863 and 1869 failed to take hold. Yet the needs of young men persisted, and the more successful associations in several other cities prompted a new effort at Rochester in 1875, which this time did prove not only enduring but also responsive to the changing moods of the city.

The "Y's" growth is properly measured in changing functions and expanding services, but it has by no means been an impersonal

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growth. The Association has, over the years, enriched the lives of countless thousands of young men and boys, some of whose names were never even recorded in the attendance records. The impact on the lives of the lay and professional leaders is more easily seen, and although the "Y" has never stressed that objective, the increasingly effective and constructive role these men have played in the life of the community has helped to integrate the "Y's" history with that of the city as a whole.

The Early Years

It was just 100 years ago this January 14 that the earliest recorded mention of a Y.M.C.A. was made in Rochester. A brief notice in the Rochester *Democrat*, signed "Y.H.," called attention to the fact that Rochester lacked any institution of this sort and offered to supply interested young men with literature on the subject.¹ "Y.H.," turned out to be the Reverend Yates Hickey, agent of the American Tract Society which had recently sent him to Rochester to take charge of the distribution of its literature throughout western New York and Ontario. In his carpet bags, besides many other tracts, were copies of the constitution and by-laws of Y.M.C.A.'s recently established in several other cities.

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The first American "Y's" had appeared only two years before in Montreal and Boston and the ink was hardly dry on their first annual reports. Where Hickey got his copies is not known but young men in thirty American cities had already responded to the inspiration provided by the organization of the first Y.M.C.A. in London just a decade before. That the new institution filled a widespread need was clearly evident as sixteen cities in Great Britain and many on the Continent quickly adopted the London pattern. It was a timely movement for the growth of cities throughout the Western world was attracting young men in great numbers from villages and farms and crowding them into urban boarding houses far from the influence of home and church. Uprooted and lonely in the strange urban environment, many were ready to welcome the opportunity to join other young men of similar interests in a purposeful association.

Apparently there were others besides the Reverend Yates Hickey who left the same need in Rochester, for a week after his notice

appeared in the *Democrat*, the same paper carried a response signed "N." endorsing the proposal. Ten young men met at the American Tract Society's rooms on February 23 and agreed to call an organization meeting at the Common Council room in the City Hall on February 27. The response was encouraging and after two further meetings at the First Presbyterian Church, the Rochester Y.M.C.A. was formally organized on March 13, 1854, with fifty young men enrolled as charter members. The Reverend Addison B. Atkins of Trinity Episcopal Church was elected president, and a constitution patterned after that of Boston was adopted.¹

The object of the Association as expressed in the constitution was "the improvement of the social, mental and spiritual condition of young men;" its purpose was "to organize and prepare them for united and systematic Christian labor in this city and vicinity." All young men (under 40) who were members in good standing of an Evangelical church were invited to become Active Members with the payment of annual dues of \$1.00; other young men "of good moral character" were welcomed to associate membership at the same fee and were assured all privileges except those of voting and holding office.²

Thus the movement was launched in Rochester under staunch Evangelical leadership. Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal vice-presidents were elected, and three from each of these denominations were named to the Board of Managers. The Reverend Yates Hickey was chosen Corresponding Secretary. Most of these men were elders or trustees of the principal churches or the sons of such leaders. The program featured a morning prayer meeting for members at the "Y" rooms opened in Corinthian Hall. The room was conveniently located on the second floor in that central building, across the hall from the library of the older Athenaeum and Mechanics Association. A lecture committee arranged a series of talks by local clergymen, and a small library of religious books was assembled.

As corresponding secretary, Hickey soon learned of the plans for the first American convention of Y.M.C.A.'s. That convention, promoted by the Washington association, met in nearby Buffalo in June 1854, and the Rochester "Y" was among the 32 invited to attend. Unfortunately the resignation of President Atkins that month, in response to a call from another city, deprived the infant organization of the necessary leadership, and Rochester was not among the 19 cities

represented at the first convention though it did promptly join the Confederation which was launched there.*

Professor N. W. Benedict, head of the Collegiate Institute, served out the remainder of Atkins's term. A severe blight had recently invaded the wheat fields of the Genesee valley, and a poor crop, the second in a row, deprived the Flour City of its principal raw material, inflicting a crippling blow on Rochester's economy.⁷ Hardship was widespread, and in the absence of a suitable relief agency the "Y" decided in February 1855 to open two depots for the collection of clothing and other supplies for the poor. A committee of 60 visitors was organized to distribute these donations and Dr. Chester Dewey of the university, who served as special relief treasurer, took in and distributed a total of \$1200 before the first annual meeting that spring.*

While the "Y" thus demonstrated its usefulness to the community, important phases of its work remained untouched. The urgent need for work among the 8000 German-speaking young men of Rochester was noted in the first annual report which cited the example the Montreal "Y" had set in this field. This was a more serious matter in Rochester than many realized, for the hard times which hit the city in 1854 continued for several years, prompting many of its vigorous young men to strike out in search of more promising opportunities elsewhere. Their places locally were being filled by newcomers from abroad, chiefly Irish and German, and while most of the Irish were Catholic, many of the Germans and other continentals were Protestants who might have profited by the opportunities the Association afforded. Unfortunately the "Y" of a century ago failed to meet this challenge. No German names appeared among its officers and no record of a special program in their behalf has come to light.*

Many other difficulties beset Hickey who was elected third president that spring. Several of the original directors were dropping out, some to leave town, others to devote closer attention to their business affairs.¹⁰ Two newly arrived clergymen accepted appointment as vice-presidents and the Association lent its energies to the union prayer meetings sponsored by several churches that fall. President Hickey was often out of town, busy with the distribution of religious tracts, 18,584 of which were given away and four times that number sold during the year.¹¹ Funds for the \$400 budget, covering rental and supervision of the "Y" room, came in slowly and the membership

fell below the 199 reached the previous year. Finally, when Hickey pressed the editor of the *Union* to print "Y" notices free of charge, the editor responded with a blast against begging societies, and nothing more was heard of the first Rochester "Y."¹³

* * *

Several of the other early Y. M. C. A.'s likewise disappeared in the late fifties, but those in the larger or more dynamically growing cities survived and joined the new associations of younger communities in five annual conventions all of which Rochester missed.¹⁴ The Flour City was definitely in the doldrums and such energies as it could muster were going into the maintenance of its struggling university and theological seminary. The union prayer meeting movement, which rallied strength to the "Y's" of several cities in 1857 and 1858, had spent itself in Rochester during the previous two years, and when it revived locally in March 1858 lasted only a fortnight.¹⁵

The thriving success of the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association in these years, with its growing library and active lecture program, supplied some of the other "Y" services. Indeed most of its lectures were on religious or reform subjects, and on at least one night two national stars shared its platform—Emerson and Greeley.¹⁶ When on another occasion Henry Ward Beecher addressed the Athenaeum, urging the formation of Y. M. C. A.'s on the Brooklyn model, Rochester paid no heed.

The Civil War greatly changed the situation. Lincoln's call for troops prompted several Northern "Y's" to form volunteer companies, thus depleting their own ranks. Scarcely twenty city "Y's" continued active meetings in 1862, but meanwhile the frightful character of the struggle, and the discovery that it would be a long war, created a new function for association leaders.¹⁷ The organization of the Christian Commission late in 1861 provided a field of service for "Y" men in army camps and hospitals, prompting the revival of several associations. Its appeal for support reached Rochester in February 1863, and while no immediate organization was effected, the need was demonstrated.

A young men's prayer meeting, which grew out of a revival at Brick Church, provided the nucleus of a movement for Rochester's second "Y." After several preliminary meetings at First and Brick Presbyterian churches, a new Association was formally organized on

June 8, 1863. The leadership this time was non-clerical and George W. Parsons, superintendent of the Gas Works, was elected president supported by an executive committee of business men only one of whom had been associated with the direction of the earlier "Y."

The program of Rochester's second "Y" was still strongly Evangelical. A room was rented over the Commercial Bank on Exchange Street and there the young men gathered on Saturday evenings for regular prayer meetings.²⁰ A new interest was revealed, however, when the lecture series which opened in December featured an address on "The Model Wife." The fund drive for the Christian Commission absorbed much "Y" effort and netted \$829 within a few months.²¹ Sabbath school missions were conducted in the outlying sections of the city and at Camp Genesee and Camp Halstead where Rochester enlistees were congregated while awaiting assignment. At the close of an active year the Association met on June 6, 1864, and elected Roswell Hart Rochester, grandson of Colonel Rochester, as president. Prayer meetings continued through the year and a lecture series that winter concluded in April 1865 with an address by John B. Gough on "Fact and Fiction."²²

The second Rochester "Y" maintained active participation in state and national "Y" conventions. Delegates were sent to Boston in 1863 and to Philadelphia two years later and to the state convention at Oswego in 1866.²³ William R. Seward, cashier of the Bank of Rochester, was chosen third president in June 1865, and, as the close of the war had freed the Association of responsibilities to the Christian Commission, its leaders were ready to explore new fields.²⁴ A lecture series that fall included a benefit concert to raise funds for a mission Sunday school which the "Y" had established in the German district.²⁵ The press gave scant notice to any further activities of the second Association; no election was reported the next spring though an excursion on the lake in the "Flour City" was announced on August 1, 1867.²⁶ That first evidence of an interest in amusement may have finished the second Rochester "Y" for nothing more is heard of it. However, a student "Y" organized at the university in 1864, continued to hold occasional lectures by faculty members and scheduled a week of prayers in November 1867.²⁷

No record of the dissolution of the second Rochester "Y" has survived, but the Rochester Directory for 1869 lists the officers of a

Y. M. C. A. which it describes as "organized on June 1, 1869." It is interesting to observe that its first president, Wayland Benedict, was a son of the Professor Benedict who had served the original "Y" as second president. The younger Benedict was a student at the Rochester Theological Seminary and on his graduation a year later E. H. Hollister, lumberman and the only man who had served both the first and second "Y's," accepted the presidency. William R. Seward was active again, this time as treasurer. Meetings were held for several months at the Eastman Hall in the Arcade and then moved back to the second floor of the Merchants Bank."

The one extended notice received by this third "Y" reveals the presence of a disturbing theological issue. Apparently its leaders had sought to broaden their fold by extending a welcome to "any young man who will pledge himself to work for the good of young men and who will subscribe to these articles of association. . . ."

Several non-Evangelicals had joined as a result and everybody was apparently happy until the National Convention at Portland adopted a ruling excluding any association which enrolled non-Evangelicals as active members. When the Rochester "Y" amended its constitution in conformity with that ruling, the *U. & A.* published a lengthy attack by DeLancy Crittenden who proposed the organization instead of a Christian Union. Boston, a strong Unitarian center, had a Y.M.C.U., but none was formed in Rochester and little more is heard of the third "Y."

An abortive effort to reorganize occurred in 1872 but expired after one meeting, and three more years slipped by before a permanent "Y" was established. Yet the friends of young men were not entirely inactive in Rochester. The Athenaeum opened its new quarters over the Rochester Savings Bank in 1871 where it enjoyed several prosperous seasons. A Rochester Lyceum, organized by younger men that year, conducted lectures and discussions for two years in the Common Council room.* A young Men's Catholic Association was formed in 1872, but its ambitious decision to acquire a building of its own so burdened its officers with debt that the program was sacrificed to commercial efforts in order to meet the recurrent payments. " Meanwhile the student "Y" at the University maintained weekly prayers during the winter season and assembled for an annual sermon at commence-

ment time—a tradition which persisted until the college baccalaureate sermon took its place in 1890.²²

Permanent Beginnings

A resurgent evangelism contributed to the reestablishment of the Rochester "Y" in 1875. The effort this time proved permanent, and while the leaders encountered many difficulties and suffered discouraging reversals, they were able to maintain and eventually to expand their program to meet the broader needs of a growing community. Even the limited objectives of the late seventies soon taxed the facilities available at their headquarters. The establishment of a Railroad "Y" and the introduction of outdoor activity relieved the situation somewhat, but the need for a larger and more adequate building provided the major concern of the eighties. A full acceptance of the broader program of the "Y," responding to the physical and social as well as the mental and spiritual needs of young men, had to await the opening of the new building in 1890.

* * *

The successful establishment of the Rochester "Y" grew out of a small prayer meeting held by six young men in the Reynolds Arcade. A public meeting was called at Central Presbyterian Church on July 9, 1875, and Edwin D. Ingersoll of the State "Y" was invited to address the 40 young men who attended. Horace McGuire, a young lawyer, was chosen president and a constitution following the accepted pattern was adopted a week later, enrolling young men of Evangelical churches as active members and all others as associate members. A vacant store at No. 6 Main Street East was leased and furnished with chairs and kerosene lamps by friendly patrons. A sprinkling of sawdust supplied a familiar carpet for the prayer services conducted there every night for several weeks.

Not satisfied with this limited program, Austin H. Cole, grocer, who succeeded McGuire as president after a few months, scheduled a series of revival meetings in an old variety theater overlooking the canal back of Exchange Street. It was in the section known as "Murderers' Row" the toughest part of town, and the combined efforts of a Buffalo evangelist and a volunteer men's choir led by the "Y" secretary helped in the course of a few months, as McGuire later recalled, to turn hundreds of young men from lives of drunkenness and evil habits and greatly "sweetened the atmosphere of Murderers' Row." The

activity strained the resources of the Association but fortunately a check for \$600 from George C. Buell, wholesale grocer and banker, paid off the debt."

The youthful leaders of the "Y" had meanwhile secured larger quarters in the new Occumpaugh building which was erected to fill the gap on the south side of Main Street Bridge. When the "Y" moved into its new quarters in February 1876, the need for a full time attendant became evident, and Harrah J. Reynolds, a young clerk who had been chosen vice-president, served as acting General Secretary until Frank L. Smith, experienced in "Y" work in Indianapolis, was engaged for the job in April. The new quarters boasted a reading room or library and a social room facing on Main Street, with an assembly room in back capable of seating 100 and a smaller prayer room where noon-time prayers were scheduled daily. A young bookkeeper, Theron E. Parsons, son of the George W. Parsons of the second "Y," was elected president at the annual meeting in May when the total membership, active and associate, exceeded 400."

An active program was undertaken. In addition to the daily prayer meeting, a Sunday afternoon song service, a Bible study class, a Monday evening meeting and four neighborhood mission services were scheduled weekly. The rooms were opened to a pastors' conference once a week and to the Ladies' Flower Mission every Friday. General Secretary Smith compiled a list of recommended rooms and placed 20 out of 100 applicants for jobs." Revival services were conducted that summer in the Opera House and special meetings were scheduled at the "Y" rooms for newsboys and bootblacks, for a Boys Christian Association—even a sewing class for girls once a week. A lecture program was announced, starting in December with the favorite topic, "The Model Wife," but despite this active program the Association failed to attract sufficient support to pay its secretary's salary, and Smith resigned in January to accept a more secure position in the Brooklyn "Y."

D. L. Ogden, who became General Secretary a month or so later, introduced two important innovations. Perhaps the initiative in the first instance came from George C. Buell who was elected president that May. A new classification of sustaining members, each to pay \$10 a year, was created, while the younger active and associate members paid only \$1 each. With over 300 sustaining members the "Y"

was able to render more adequate services to its 249 active members that year. A Yokefellows band, patterned on one established by Moody in Chicago a few years before, was organized by twenty young men who pledged themselves to daily Bible study, and the "Y" ventured at the same time to arrange a promenade concert to which young ladies from the various churches were invited.³³ There was in fact a movement at this time to admit young women to membership, but the proposal was frowned upon and the ladies contented themselves with the organization of a Women's Auxiliary in 1878.³⁴

Ogden resigned and left the city the next year but Buell carried on as president for several years and persuaded Harrah Reynolds to fill in again as General Secretary until an experienced man could be found. It was in this interim period that the Rochester "Y" first played host to the New York State convention in February 1880, and the inspiration received from that gathering helped to make the year 1880 a memorable one in local "Y" history.³⁵ In the enthusiasm engendered by the convention Buell announced plans for a drive for \$100,000 for a new building and engaged F. R. Wardle as the new General Secretary. The final liquidation of the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association in the late seventies had closed its library, increasing the demand for books from the "Y," and a "book reception" staged at its rooms early in 1880 brought a donation of several hundred additional volumes. A series of weekly entertainments, commenced that January, likewise proved popular and several strawberry festivals attracted large crowds in June. The rooms were renovated and this together with the livelier program attracted an increasing attendance at all meetings.³⁶

While the new building fund drive did not immediately catch hold, sufficient support was enlisted to establish a Railroad "Y." An apartment was opened for its use on the second floor of the building at 136 State Street in October 1880, and G. A. Abbott of Lowell arrived the next March as its full-time secretary. All railroad men were invited to use its reading room, parlors and bath, and the response was so great that larger quarters were soon needed. Shortly after the new station was opened on St. Paul Street in 1883 a new east-side site was likewise found for the Railroad "Y" on Central Avenue and a program of entertainments was organized for this group by the Women's Auxiliary.³⁷ Its members were welcomed to the "Y" headquarters on the

bridge, and a newly organized Commercial Travelers Association was encouraged to hold occasional meetings there too; the college "Y" likewise gathered there at least once a month during the winter season."

Special activity groups made their appearance in the early eighties under the leadership of F. D. Helmer who succeeded Wardle as General Secretary in November 1880. The first was the Rambling Club organized in 1881 by a group of young clerks who met at the "Y" each Thursday noon for a hike to a nearby point of interest. Their first picnic lunch at the lower falls on May 20 that year was pronounced a great success." A "Y" bicycle club was formed the next year, when the first gym class was likewise organized to make use of the "novel device for gymnastic exercise" which had been acquired by the "Y" and installed in the social room in September 1882. A debating society was organized that December and with the other thriving activities so greatly increased the attendance at the "Y" headquarters that pledges to the new building fund reached \$26,500 the next year."

The building fund campaign was not making the necessary progress, however. Most of the pledges were contingent on the raising of a sufficient fund to erect and equip the building, and none were ready to match Buell's subscription of \$5,000. In order to encourage others to accept larger responsibilities, Buell stepped out as president in 1884 and was replaced by Professor George M. Forbes of the university who rallied strong backers including, in addition to Buell, Joseph T. Alling, William S. Kimball, Rufus A. Sibley and Robert S. Paviour. The Honorable Chauncey M. Depew was brought to Rochester to address a "Y" banquet in June 1886 and the fund was pushed up to \$50,000 by the next January. However, no pledge was binding until a total of \$75,000 was reached, and that figure was not attained for another year."

If the building fund campaign was dragging, the "Y" program was displaying sufficient vitality to assure its ultimate success. Dean Alvord, who succeeded Helmer as General Secretary in 1885, had a strong faith in education, and under Professor Forbes as president and Professor Albert H. Mixer as vice-president a number of classes were organized for the serious study of political science, English and German as well as stenography and mechanical drawing." Religious meetings were not neglected, and an evangelistic series was occasionally

announced, but that feature no longer received major emphasis. Annual "Y" picnics on Memorial Day at Canandaigua Lake or Silver Lake won favor in the mid-eighties. A regular baseball team was organized to compete with other local nines, an outing club was organized in July 1887, and the prayer room at the headquarters was equipped for games of Crokinola, parlor croquet, targets and other parlor games. Nevertheless all such activities were suspended for the noon-time prayer hour from 12 to 1 which continued to attract an average daily attendance of 19.⁴

The Women's Auxiliary became increasingly active in the later eighties. To its original function of supplying a feminine touch for the social gatherings of the city and railroad "Y's" was now added a share of the responsibility for the fund campaign. Mrs. Alling, as its president in 1887, took a group of Rochester ladies to Syracuse to look over the new building recently erected there. The Auxiliary accepted the task of furnishing the new building and collected \$2450 for this purpose during the next three years.⁵

The "Y" was heartily congratulated by the press when its fund campaign passed the \$75,000 figure in March 1888, but the long delay had seen a sharp advance in the estimated cost and the leaders dared not relax their efforts. Changing concepts of "Y" work had introduced a demand for new features, such as a gymnasium and swimming pool, and a special campaign was launched to raise an additional \$5000 for that purpose alone.⁶ A site was selected overlooking the river and the aqueduct on south St. Paul Street (South Avenue) and the cornerstone was laid on July 25, 1889. Finally, despite construction delays the five-story building was completed and dedicated with great ceremony on November 7, 1890.⁷

The finance committee's report at the dedication meeting was not so encouraging. The total cost had soared to \$180,000 of which \$100,000 had been paid from earlier subscriptions. Nearly a third of the remainder was pledged by enthusiastic citizens in response to Alling's plea that night, but the "Y" was forced to bond itself for \$60,000.⁸ The members, nevertheless, felt well pleased as they surveyed their new facilities. From the spacious lobby, where registration desks featured placement and room lists and other information of interest to young men, visitors could enter the library and the lounging room or ascend the broad stairs to the Music Hall auditorium

which would accommodate crowds of over 1,000. Study and club rooms above and the gymnasium, swimming pool, baths and lockers in the basement provided a combination of features unequalled in Rochester. Plans to equip the top two floors as a dormitory were deferred by the shortage of funds and the space was leased to the Rochester Business University on a long term basis."

The South Avenue "Y"

The opening of the new building on South St. Paul Street (later renamed South Avenue) launched a new era of "Y" developments in Rochester. Several aspects of the broader program, which had often been hinted at in the past, now gained fuller expression. Programs for the physical and mental improvement of young men were greatly expanded. Yet the most remarkable innovation of the period occurred in the changing attitude toward society. A new concept of social service began to emerge as the Rochester "Y" struggled to meet the challenge of its urban environment. The board of directors provided one of the vital centers in which the strategy of the social gospel was formulated in Rochester.

Two important constitutional changes were made in the "Y" charter in 1890. The old provision for the separation of active and associate membership was dropped in order to remove the stigma long attached to young men of non-Evangelical faiths. All young men of good moral character were now admitted on the same basis and paid \$8 fees; boys under sixteen were admitted for \$5 to a junior membership. The applications of 15 Polish Jews were duly accepted after a month's delay in 1891, and soon the number of Jewish and Catholic as well as Unitarian members comprised a respectable minority. However the Evangelical test was still required of all officers and directors and the stability of the "Y" was assured by increasing the number of directors from 15 to 21 and by making the board self-perpetuating, with the election of one third each year."

Joseph T. Alling, a vigorous businessman and popular Sabbath school teacher who had contributed greatly to the success of the "Y's" building campaign, was chosen president to succeed Forbes in 1891 when the latter resigned to give full attention to his new responsibilities on the Board of Education. When Alvord resigned as General Secretary, because of poor health, Albert H. Whitford was called from the Cambridge "Y" to replace him." A campaign for members increased

the total from 664 in 1889 to 1309 in 1891. Over 800 signified their desire for gym privileges and the appointment of two physical instructors soon followed. The old bicycle club was revived and formally organized."

All aspects of the "Y" program, save perhaps its library, displayed a new vitality. A Sunday afternoon service for men was started in November 1890 and attracted crowds of 500 to 1,000 every week.²⁸ A New Year's reception was instituted that January and a Thanksgiving dinner for young men away from home was added the next year.²⁹ A convention of "Y" secretaries met in Rochester in February 1891 and Ira Sankey, Moody's great song leader, opened the week's program with a rousing public service at the Music Hall.³⁰ A Star Lecture course was introduced that fall when the "Y" signed a contract with the Redpath Lyceum bureau for seven prominent lecturers on general subjects. Tickets sold for one dollar for the season and brought in a surplus of \$446 the first year, assuring its repetition for many years. An evangelist was engaged for a fortnight that November and six Bible study classes met weekly through the winter.³¹

It soon became evident that this expanded program would require more generous support. Receipts from fees, tickets and subscriptions had increased to \$14, 837 in 1891 but a deficit of \$2,249 had nevertheless been incurred. New revenues were needed, Alling declared in his next annual report, to expand the library and permit an extension of the outdoor program; fortunately a group of 100 sponsoring members responded, though never with all the funds needed.³² The Rochester "Y" adopted the triangle as its symbol that year and joined other associations in pledging to serve the physical, mental and spiritual needs of young men.³³ All local branches of the "Y"—the college, railroad and boys divisions as well as the regular city membership, participated in the increased enrollment, and the Women's Auxiliary redoubled its efforts in support of the "Y."³⁴

Several additional features were soon introduced. A series of receptions for laboring men in various trade groups developed new contacts in the winter of 1892-93 and made the "Y" more responsive to the needs of the unemployed during the depression that followed.³⁵ Concern for the 6,000 or more German-speaking young men in Rochester prompted the organization of a German club in 1893 which grew into the German Department a year later with four rooms on the fourth

floor set aside for its use.⁶⁶ A program of Saturday evening free concerts for men was commenced in the summer of 1893 in an effort to supply wholesome diversion to the unemployed who roamed the downtown streets.⁶⁷ Classes in practical trades were likewise offered—in electronics, carpentry and mechanical drawing—thus enabling young men to improve their skills during the depression.⁶⁸ The third annual athletic exhibition by the "Y" was held in the Rink that year and introduced the first public performance of basketball in Rochester.⁶⁹

The introduction of competitive sports brought new vitality to the athletic program. To the earlier goals of individual health and skill was now added the social value of team spirit. The several basketball teams organized at the "Y" formed a league in 1899 and a football team was organized.⁷⁰ A room on the fourth floor was made available for a few years as a girls' gym until the Y.W.C.A. supplied comparable facilities.⁷¹ The competitive spirit even enlivened the membership drives as blue and red ribbon teams were organized in the campaign of 1895, boosting the total to 2113 as a result.⁷²

An important new activity appeared in 1892. Occasional picnics and excursions had been scheduled during the eighties and the outing club had taken some overnight trips, but the first camping experience was that enjoyed by 12 boys and two leaders who pitched two tents on the bluff overlooking Sodus Bay for a week in 1892. The summer camp movement had already gained a start in a few other cities and the Rochester "Y's" camp at Conesus Lake in successive summers provided a rich experience to 60 or more boys under the able direction, generally, of Colonel Samuel P. Moulthrop. A summer cottage was leased on the lake in 1895 but abandoned the next year as the "Y" opened its first boat house on the upper river.⁷³

Whitford's work soon attracted calls from other city "Y's" and early in 1898 he accepted one from Buffalo. Alling had resigned as president the previous year to save the "Y" from the political controversies his Good Government movement was creating, but William A. Hubbard who succeeded him had long been a staunch "Y" supporter and as a prosperous business man and Sunday school leader attracted strong backing. M. L. Starrett was engaged as General Secretary and the active programs of the early nineties were maintained.⁷⁴ Indeed several new activities were added, notably a camera club, the first in Rochester which held the photographic city's first photographic exhibit at the "Y"

in 1899." That exhibit became an annual affair and may have interested George Eastman in the "Y's" affairs, in any event he made an unexpected offer in 1904 to match any sum the "Y" could raise, up to \$40,000, to liquidate its debt, and while the response was slow the "Y" was able two years later to burn its mortgages and clear up its books."

* * *

Despite this apparent success, serious doubts were voiced concerning the "Y's" influence. Both the active and the total membership had declined slowly after 1895 while the city's growth had continued, greatly increasing the number of young men who never attended the "Y." " When a survey of the city's social needs was made by a "Y" committee headed by Walter Rauschenbusch in 1904, the need for much additional and new work was revealed. The presence in Rochester of thousands of unmarried young men and women, separated from family and church ties and living in more or less desolate rooming houses, presented a challenge which the "Y" could not hope to meet alone. Yet new efforts to reach these men were needed if they were to be saved from the gambling halls, saloons and other dens of iniquity with which Rochester seemed to abound."

The "Y's" Sunday afternoon services had welcomed these men for many years, but apparently many non-members hesitated to enter the "Y" building. If they would not come to the "Y," the "Y" would go to them, its board decided, and with the backing of the Ministerial Association a series of Sunday afternoon services in the Lyceum Theater was launched amid much publicity in 1905." A mass meeting for boys was scheduled at the same time in the "Y's" Music Hall where an occasional motion picture feature was added in an effort to attract boys from the pool rooms and other low resorts." Both meetings attracted crowds and spurred drives for special funds to finance them in succeeding years, yet a few "Y" leaders became convinced that only through the more intimate associations of smaller and permanent groups could a real contribution be made."

Unfortunately the "Y" building was already proving inadequate. A second gym for boys, also a cycle track and swimming pool, were desired, and it was hoped for a time that the Music Hall might be appropriated and remodeled for this purpose. Dormitories were needed, too, and the possibility of reclaiming and remodeling the top floors for that use was considered." Unfortunately the "Y's" campaign to liqui-

date its debt was too recent to permit a new fund drive, and the business school which held a long term lease to the top floors resisted eviction. Starrett accepted a call from the Denver "Y" and Henry W. Conklin, who had succeeded Hubbard as president in 1904, was forced to carry on with an acting secretary for a year and then gave the position to that relatively inexperienced official.⁸

A period of indecision followed as the advocates of the social gospel contended for influence against those who relied chiefly on evangelism. As the "Y's" theater meetings became increasingly evangelistic, two independent theater programs were launched, one by the ex-cleric Algernon Crapsey, philosophical and radical, the other by Dr. Paul Moore Strayer and Professor Rauschenbusch, champions of the social gospel.⁹ It was not until Edwin A. Stebbins was elected president in 1909 that the "Y" achieved a satisfactory compromise between these rival points of view. The new harmony was engendered by the sessions of the Laymen's Missionary Conference and the Student Volunteer Convention which met in Rochester in 1909 and 1910 respectively, to be followed shortly by the Men and Religion Forward Movement, all of which used the "Y" as a focal center, renewing its evangelistic spirit and infusing it with a new social consciousness.¹⁰

A new emphasis on boys' work had been developing in several churches, particularly at the Unitarian, St. Andrew's Episcopal and Brick Presbyterian churches, and their success with small groups and that of boys clubs elsewhere pointed up the need for more enduring associations than the mass entertainments formerly offered by the "Y." With this object in view the boys' work secretary at the "Y," Frank Gugelman, cooperated with Colonel Moulthrop in organizing the first Rochester troop of Boy Scouts. Their first hike started from the "Y" on October 1, 1910, a modest beginning for a movement which developed rapidly and marvelously in later years and established its independence from the "Y" with the organization of a Local Council in January 1913.¹¹

The "Y's" service was reaching beyond its membership in many other respects, too. Its leaders had recognized that the need for dormitory rooms was greater at the Railroad "Y" than at the main building and a new home had been acquired and opened for that branch in 1907.¹² Not only were the members of the railroad and university branches welcomed to the facilities at the central "Y," but its gym-

nasium was made available for games between various church teams. The reasons for taking out an active "Y" membership were lessened and "Y" statistics no doubt suffered, but the churches gained new opportunities to win the loyalty of their youth and new experience in cooperation, too.⁸ The time devoted to the Men and Religion Forward Movement by E. A. Stebbins, who served as its chairman as well as "Y" president, and by Robert B. Adams the new General Secretary in 1911,⁹ limited their contributions to the members but helped to win Rochester to a faith in social work as distinct from evangelism. Indeed the succession of conferences organized in Rochester and vicinity by Herbert F. Laflamme, the regional director of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, and energetically backed by Stebbins and other "Y" leaders, who gave the full time of a "Y" secretary to the cause, was described by the aging Joseph Farley as more comparable in its spiritual and emotional impact to the early revivals of Charles G. Finney than anything he had seen in Rochester for 50 years.¹⁰

When, after several invitations, Herbert P. Lansdale, Sr., finally accepted a call to Rochester in 1912 the "Y" acquired a leader who was ready for further cooperative efforts. The Bible classes at the "Y" were transformed into a training school for Sabbath school teachers with Dr. Henry Applegarth of the Park Avenue Baptist Church and Walter S. Hubbell, leader of Central Presbyterian's famous Men's class, as principal instructors. Under their guidance and that of their successor, Dr. Herbert Gates, assistant pastor of Brick Church, the program of study was transformed from a close analysis of Bible texts to a broader interpretation of the application of Christian principles to modern life. In similar fashion, part of the "Y's" recreational program was transformed into a training school for recreational leaders both for the playgrounds and the churches, and a series of Older Boy conferences was inaugurated to enroll and train young men for leadership in camp and scout work.¹¹

Lansdale likewise revived the work among Rochester's nationality groups. The Germans had by this time outgrown the need for special attention, but the more recent influx of Italians prompted the organization of an Italian-speaking club, known as the Italian Y.M.C.A., for which special programs were organized. A British-American Brotherhood was welcomed to the "Y," and classes in English speech were organized for Poles, Lithuanians, Macedonians and Russians, as well

as for Italians, and teachers proficient in these languages as well as in English were engaged."

These services to the broader community, as distinguished from the "Y" membership, ultimately built up the demand for a more adequate "Y" building. Thus the popularity of the boys' programs and the awakened concern for the welfare of their youth challenged the churches to provide recreational centers similar to Gannett House and Brick Church Institute. However, the cooperative spirit recently engendered among the churches prompted several of the pastors in the northwestern section of the city to band together and request the "Y" to establish a branch in their neighborhood. Soon the churches in the southeast section, then those in the southwest section, were pleading for neighborhood "Y's" where the activities of the boys' groups could be centered in a wholesome environment near their homes and churches."

Wide pressure for new "Y" services thus developed through the outlying churches. The "Y" leaders had been contemplating a new fund campaign for some time, with a new central building as its chief objective. A quiet appeal by Joseph T. Alling to George Eastman brought a pledge of \$250,000, provided the city would raise an additional \$500,000 in order to finance an adequate central building and suitable branches as well. The announcement of this offer was electrifying, but more reassuring in the long run was the success of the public drive which secured subscriptions from 5247 citizens in nine days (as contrasted with 236 subscriptions in the protracted drive of 1885-1890) and carried the campaign over the top with a total of \$765,000." The organization of teams of canvassers and the dramatization of their progress, with the aid of a big clock mounted on the front of the Powers Block, were new techniques in Rochester, introduced by Charles S. Ward, a skilled "Y" campaigner brought in for the occasion; but if Ward had perfected these techniques in other cities, he had never encountered the response he met in Rochester. A new and happy tradition of large, well organized and successful drives was established by this record breaking campaign."

The Gibbs Street "Y"

The building of the modern "Y" on Gibbs Street and the establishment of neighborhood "Y's" ushered in a new era for the local Association. A richer program was made possible, but its develop-

ment was interrupted and redirected by the First and Second World Wars, the great depression, and other major events in the community's history. Several functions which the "Y" had long performed were taken over or shared by newly established institutions, and the "Y" has had an opportunity to specialize more intensely in its services to young men.

* * *

The planning and building of the central "Y" on Gibbs Street was a major project. Costs of land and materials mounted and the top two floors could not be completed without sacrificing the branches. The Maplewood branch at least should be built, it was agreed, in order to develop the playground facilities of a site donated by George Eastman. The two buildings were completed and dedicated in 1916—the one an eight-story structure at the eastern edge of the business section, the other two stories on a spacious site in the northwest part of town.

The central "Y" was equipped with a men's and a boys' lobby, a reading room, a billiard room, and several offices on the first floor; an assembly hall, ten club and class rooms, and a large cafeteria and kitchen on the second floor; dormitory rooms and matron's quarters occupied the floors above, while two basement floors provided a large swimming pool, two gyms, several exercise and game rooms, locker rooms, shower rooms, four bowling alleys and the utility rooms. Maplewood "Y," though only two stories, provided a lobby, offices, a gym, two shower rooms, a swimming pool, locker rooms, five club rooms, a kitchen, handball court and several handicraft rooms. These excellent facilities prompted a rush of new members, and the total active membership jumped from 753 to 2145 within a year.

Again the "Y" program, like that of many other institutions, was disrupted by America's entry into the war. Staff and members alike responded, some for military duty, others for "Y" work. Those left behind helped to raise funds for "Y" canteens. So great was the distraction that much of the old program had to be suspended, and the active membership fell off sharply in the next two years. Fortunately the American phase of that great conflict was relatively brief, and the "Y" emerged in a strengthened position.³ Its objectives as a service and character building agency were clarified, and while the evangelistic spirit and faith were retained, the old techniques gave place to new social work methods.

The war had brought a consolidation of fund drives into the War Chest, which in turn gave rise to the Community Chest, and the "Y" joined with other welfare agencies in the labors and achievements of this new body, as well as in the formation of the Council of Social Agencies. Some of its independence of action was sacrificed, in return for these benefits, and the "Y" did not feel free until 1922 to launch a special building fund campaign to complete the central building and provide the two additional branches and other features. Again the drive reached its goal of \$450,000 in nine days, making possible the construction of Monroe and Arnett branches in the next two years.

Although the "Y" was thus enabled to serve its members more adequately and doubled both the active and total memberships within two years, it continued and expanded its services to the broader community. A Federation of Men's Bible Classes in the various Protestant churches was formed under "Y" leadership and Lansdale assigned two of his expanded staff to aid ministers and their assistants in work with men and boys. The Bible study program had grown into a School of Religious Education under the inspired leadership of Dr. Herbert Gates, religious education director of Brick Church. The "Y" was always careful to foster rather than supplant the church programs, and its own Father and Son banquets were staged jointly with the churches. Indeed the "Y" continued to provide a major field for cooperative effort among Rochester's Protestant churches even after the Federation of Churches, established in 1919, assumed leadership." In similar fashion it continued, through its leadership training classes, to foster the development of social work skills long after the Council of Social Agencies assumed the leadership in that field."

The city's continued growth had raised up other institutions which took over some of the earlier "Y" activities. Thus the establishment of the Public Library System in 1912 and the extension of its branches relieved the "Y" of that original function, one it had never been able to perform adequately. The development of the J.Y.M. & W.A. and the Columbus Civic Center relieved the Y.M.C.A. of some responsibility for Jewish and Catholic young men, though its membership still enrolled several hundred from these faiths in the 1930's." Similarly, the development of settlement houses in several depressed areas of the city relieved the "Y" of part of its responsibility there, while the immigration laws of the 1920's, by shutting off the flood of new immi-

grants, relaxed the pressure for special programs among nationality groups. The development of Mechanics Institute, the business schools and the evening and extension programs of the public schools, and the university, reduced the demand for the standard courses offered by the "Y's" evening school between 1923-1932, though the "Y" developed new programs of discussion groups to take its place.¹⁰⁰

Indeed the "Y" seldom enjoyed a breathing spell after the surrender of one function—too many others were awaiting its attention, and its resources were always taxed to perform them. As the churches increasingly took over the boys' work programs and sponsorship of the Scouts, the "Y" not only offered training opportunities to their leaders and scheduled tournaments in its gymnasiums but also launched a widespread Knot-Hole gang movement which enrolled some 15,000 lads of 9-15 years in neighborhood units in the 1930's.¹⁰¹ The development of Hi-Y clubs in the public high schools was pushed with vigor in the thirties and produced 34 active chapters by 1938.¹⁰² The "Y" pressed its "Learn to Swim" campaign in these years, too, with the result that its several pools were constantly in demand for classes of interested youngsters throughout the winter; its boy's secretaries have promoted the campaign in public schools and other centers.¹⁰³ A Rochester Y.M.C.A. *Weekly* was launched in September 1930 to keep the membership informed of coming events and activities.¹⁰⁴

The "Y" branches and camps have acquired a more stable character in recent decades. Frederick D. Lamb, who has served as Executive Secretary of the Railroad "Y" since 1902, has seen its activities outgrow three buildings and finally housed in a modern structure at No. 9 Hyde Park where it provides convenient and friendly services to railroad men during their layover in Rochester.¹⁰⁵ The University Branch employed its first full time secretary in 1918 and continued that service with the University's assistance until 1938, when the secretary was made the Director of the Student Union and became more strictly a university official.¹⁰⁶ The three neighborhood branches have become valuable community centers; a new Northside secretary was appointed to work with immigrant groups in the early thirties; a Westside secretary was also appointed in 1927 to work with Negro men.¹⁰⁷ More extensive developments occurred in the summer camping field. Successive camps on Conesus Lake, Sodus Bay, Canandaigua Lake and Canadice Lake were outgrown, and finally a site was chosen

on Keuka Lake for the construction of a permanent Camp Lawrence Cory, first occupied in 1920. Improvements have been made and a separate camping site for juniors developed, so that several hundred boys and young men have enjoyed one or two weeks of camp life there every summer for the last three decades.¹⁰⁸ The boat house maintained by the "Y" on the upper river continued to serve an active canoe club until 1929.

* * *

This varied program, developed in the early twenties under Lansdale's direction, with the strong support of Harper Sibley as president, was continued by S. Wirt Wiley who succeeded Lansdale as General Secretary in 1928. George G. Ford served as president for six years 1926-1931, but Harper Sibley was persuaded to assume that responsibility again in 1932.

The "Y's" responsibility was a large and difficult one throughout the thirties. The onset of the depression cut its income from memberships, activities and contributions, from a high of \$373,100 in 1929 to \$280,800 in 1934.¹⁰⁹ A more vigorous membership and scholarship campaign helped to bring this back to \$334,700 two years later, but the "Y," along with other social agencies, was compelled to face the larger responsibilities of the depression years with reduced revenue and staff. A new group of community clubs was organized in 1932 in an effort to provide the many unemployed young men with recreational opportunities and associations that would help to sustain their morale. These clubs were granted free use of "Y" facilities, both at central and at the branches, and soon enrolled 1500 non-paying members. A campaign for scholarships brought many of these young men into full membership the next year, while assistance from state and federal relief agencies enabled the "Y" to expand its outdoor programs by using the personnel these agencies supplied. New training classes were needed to take full advantage of these opportunities, and the "Y" supplied the facilities and much of the leadership here too.¹¹⁰

The trials of the depression had scarcely been surmounted when the Second World War brought its new challenges. Leadership of the "Y" had passed to a younger generation in a very literal sense. Harper Sibley was succeeded as president by Ernest A. Paviour, son of a former director and treasurer, and he in turn was succeeded by E. Reed Shutt, and Shutt by Gilbert J. C. McCurdy—both sons of earlier "Y" leaders.

Quite appropriately, Herbert P. Lansdale, Jr., took over in 1939, the post of General Secretary his father had filled so ably a decade before. Under Lansdale, Jr., the "Y" maintained its program and extended additional benefits to service men throughout the war. With the backing of such able presidents as J. Sawyer Fitch, Richard M. Harris, F. Ritter Shumway, Schuyler C. Wells, and Mercer Brugler, it has developed new vigor in the second post-war period, boosting its membership to an all-time high of 19,665 in 1952.

As in earlier years, the "Y" has not simply retired its lay leaders but has passed them on, enriched in experience, to other fields of service in the community or the nation. While the University of Rochester with other local institutions has made good use of all of these men, the Rochester "Y" was especially honored when Harper Sibley was named Chairman of the International Committee of Y.M.C.A.'s of the United States and Canada, 1940-1948, and when he served as President of the National Council, 1950-1951.

Every aspect of its program added to its hold on the community. Its expanded dormitory has provided a wholesome if temporary environment to thousands of young men during their first weeks in Rochester. Its cafeteria has attracted a steady patronage, and the congenial fellowship of the long lines at lunch and dinner has proved over the years to be an unexpected social asset. Business men were interested on other grounds too, as the activity of the Business Men's Club at the "Y" demonstrated; its physical education and social programs developed such popularity that its modest facilities were improved and expanded into a "Y" Health Club that is as complete as any in the country. The boys work program has expanded greatly, too, becoming an all year round activity with greater emphasis than ever before on the summer program. Several day camps have been conducted as well as Camp Lawrence Cory. Thus the "Y" has endeavored to keep step with the increasing number of boys in the community.

Although it is too early to attempt an historical appraisal of this recent period, it should be recorded that the public's continued faith in the "Y" was amply demonstrated by its response to two modernization campaigns in 1944 and 1947. These drives were conducted jointly with the Y.W.C.A. which received the major part of the \$2,452,868 pledged, but the Y.M.C.A.'s portion, \$613,217, was used to good ad-

vantage for building rehabilitation. The drive was a new experiment in cooperation, but it was by no means novel for the two "Y's" to cooperate, for many significant developments of the last decade had grown out of their mutual recognition of the need to encourage young men and young women to develop harmonious adjustments to their world in each other's company. The popularity of the Y-Ed programs was only one instance of this trend, and in fact the "Y's" interest in providing its young men with a fully rounded life has prompted the decision at last to admit young women, too, to full membership. Several co-ed groups have been sponsored and much is expected in the future from this reversal of a fundamental policy of earlier days.

If the "Y" has seemed unusually ready to surrender some of its functions to specialized institutions, when they promise more adequate services—as it did to the Boy Scouts, Council of Social Agencies, Federation of Churches and several others—it has never relaxed its interest. Indeed the farewell banquet honoring Herbert P. Lansdale, Jr., when he left to assume larger responsibilities as Executive of the Y.M.C.A.'s International Committee in March 1952, provided ample testimony to the cooperation and leadership he had given in an official capacity to more than a score of the city's institutions during his 13 years as General Secretary of the Rochester "Y."¹

Since the "Y" has thus become in practice a general service agency for a complex urban community, it was necessary to find a man to succeed Lansdale who had experience with similar problems. Perhaps few would have thought Honolulu closely comparable to Rochester, yet Henry G. Ellis, who served for four and a half years as General Secretary of its expanding "Y," comes from his experience there, and earlier at Utica and Waterbury, well qualified to tackle the key problems of a modern urban "Y."

Thus the flexibility which the "Y" has displayed, particularly in the last half century, in its response to the physical, mental, social and spiritual needs of young men persists and assures it a continuing place in Rochester's life.

Notes

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97. Price, *loc. cit.*, pp. 354-357, 363-365; "Historical Sketch" (1938), p. 29.
98. Chas. B. Raitt, *A Survey of Recreational Facilities in Rochester New York* (Rochester 1929), pp. 258-268.
99. "Historical Sketch" (1938) p. 18-19. Catholics and Jews had comprised 17% of the membership in 1901 and reached a high of 43% in 1934.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 27, 31.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
104. Rochester Y.M.C.A. *Weekly* Volume I, No. 1, Sept. 25, 1930.
105. "Historical Sketch," pp. 51-52; *D. & C.*, Oct. 28, 1952.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 58.
108. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.
109. "Historical Sketch," pp. 13-16.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 32, Harper Sibley letter of Oct. 9, 1935; *D. & C.*, Jan. 15, 1932; Oct. 15, 1933.

